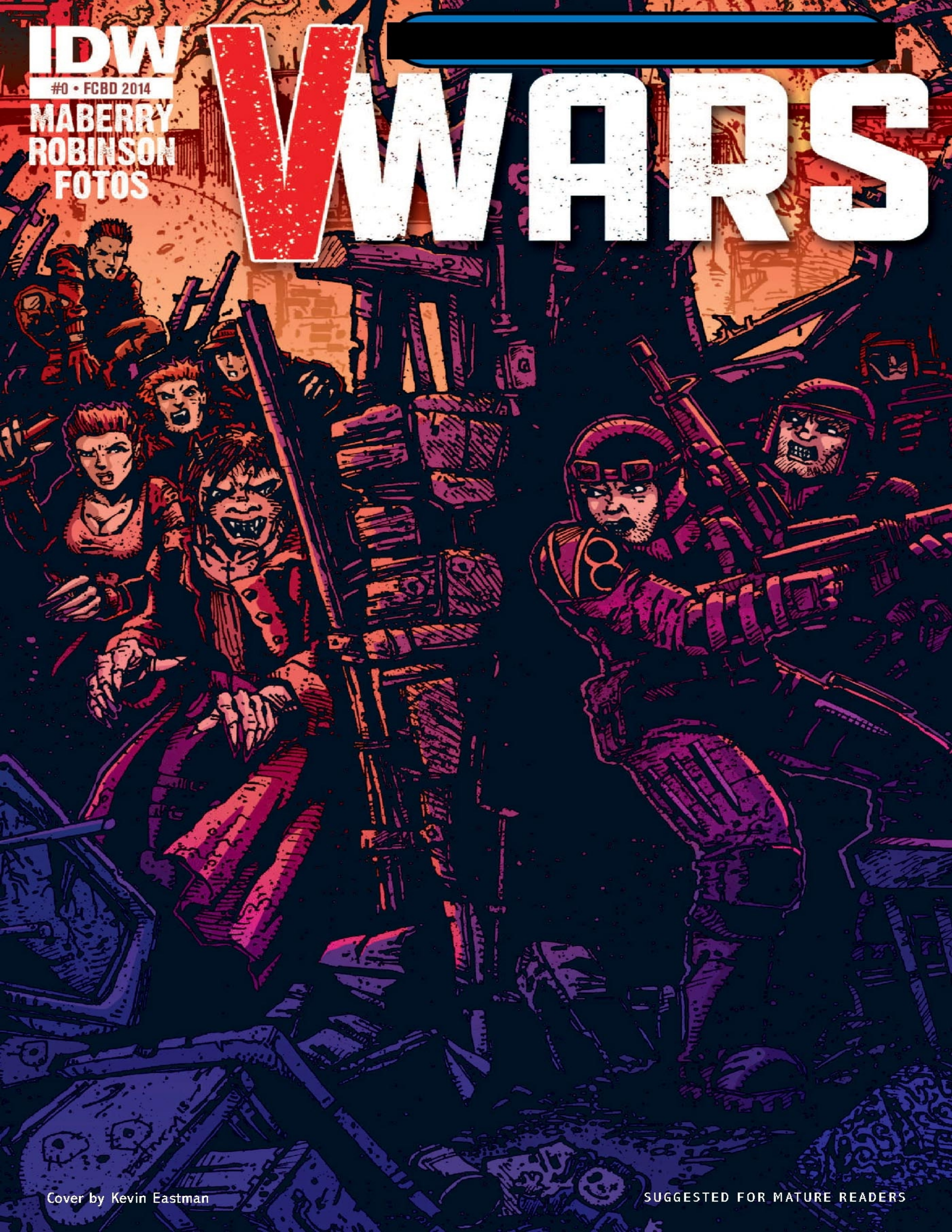
IDW

#0 • FCBD 2014

MABERRY
ROBINSON
FOTOS

[redacted]

V WARS



Cover by Kevin Eastman

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

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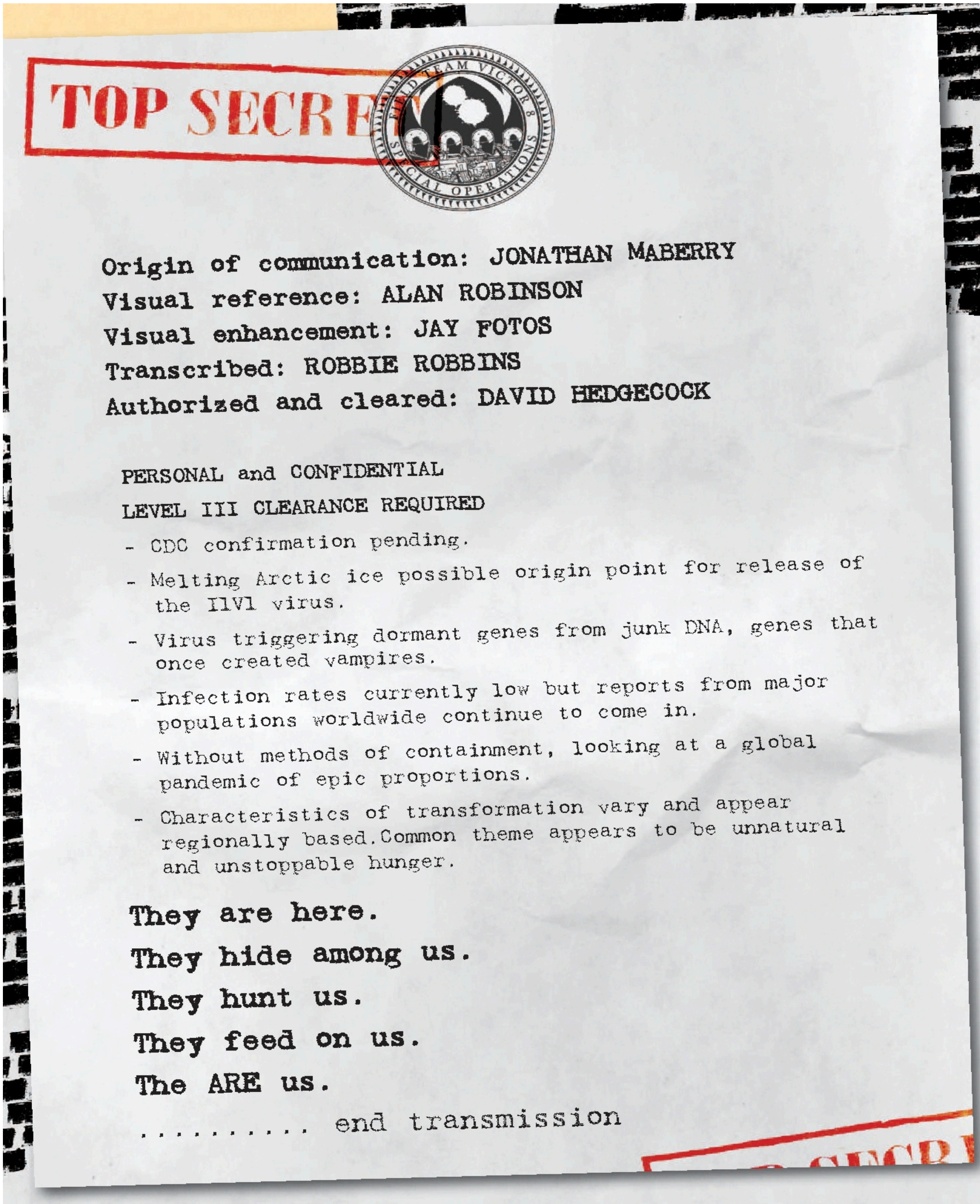

TOP SECRET

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PERSONAL and CONFIDENTIAL
LEVEL III CLEARANCE REQUIRED

- CDC confirmation pending.
- Melting Arctic ice possible origin point for release of the I1V1 virus.
- Virus triggering dormant genes from junk DNA, genes that once created vampires.
- Infection rates currently low but reports from major populations worldwide continue to come in.
- Without methods of containment, looking at a global pandemic of epic proportions.
- Characteristics of transformation vary and appear regionally based.Common theme appears to be unnatural and unstoppable hunger.

They are here.
They hide among us.
They hunt us.
They feed on us.
The ARE us.

.... end transmission

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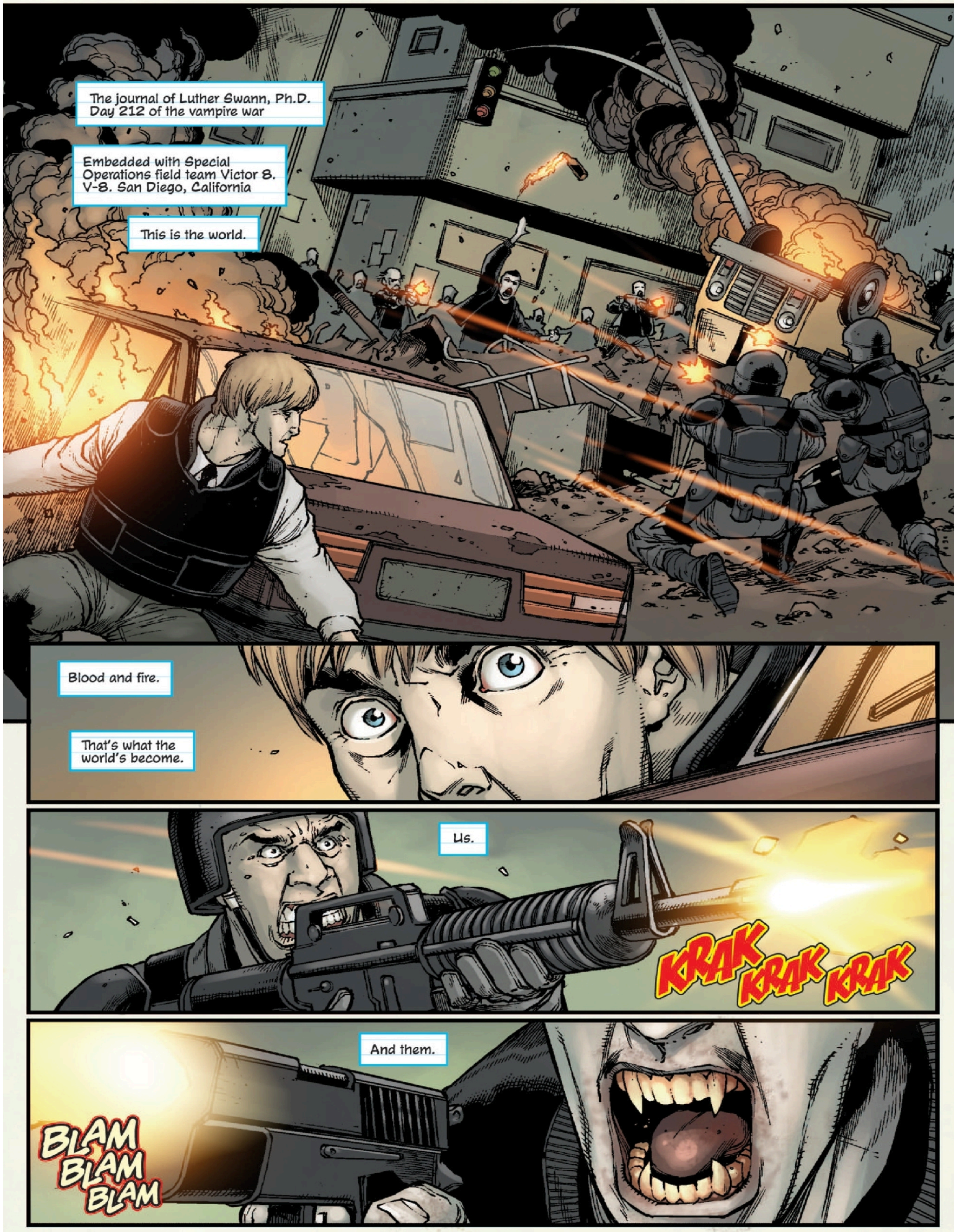
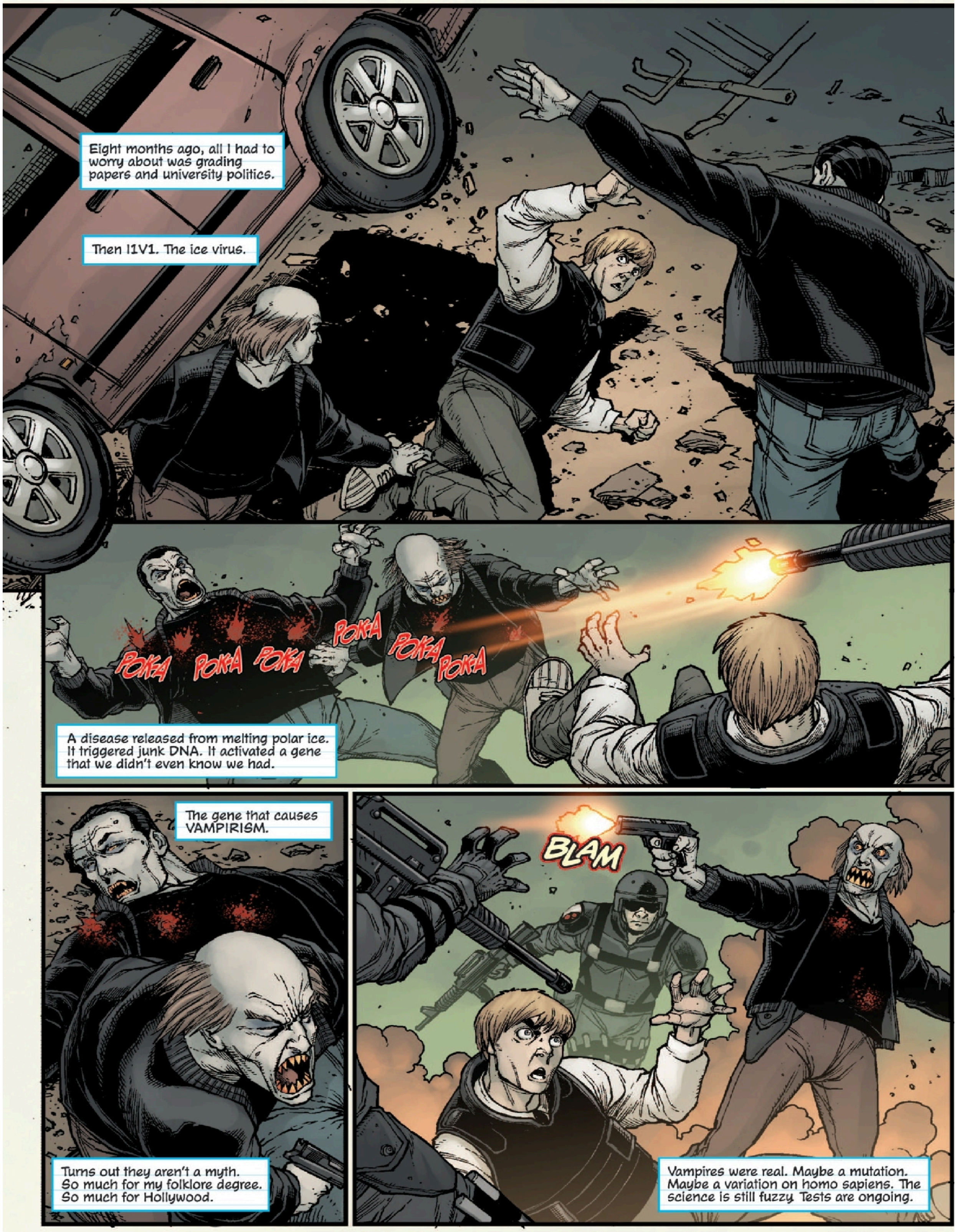
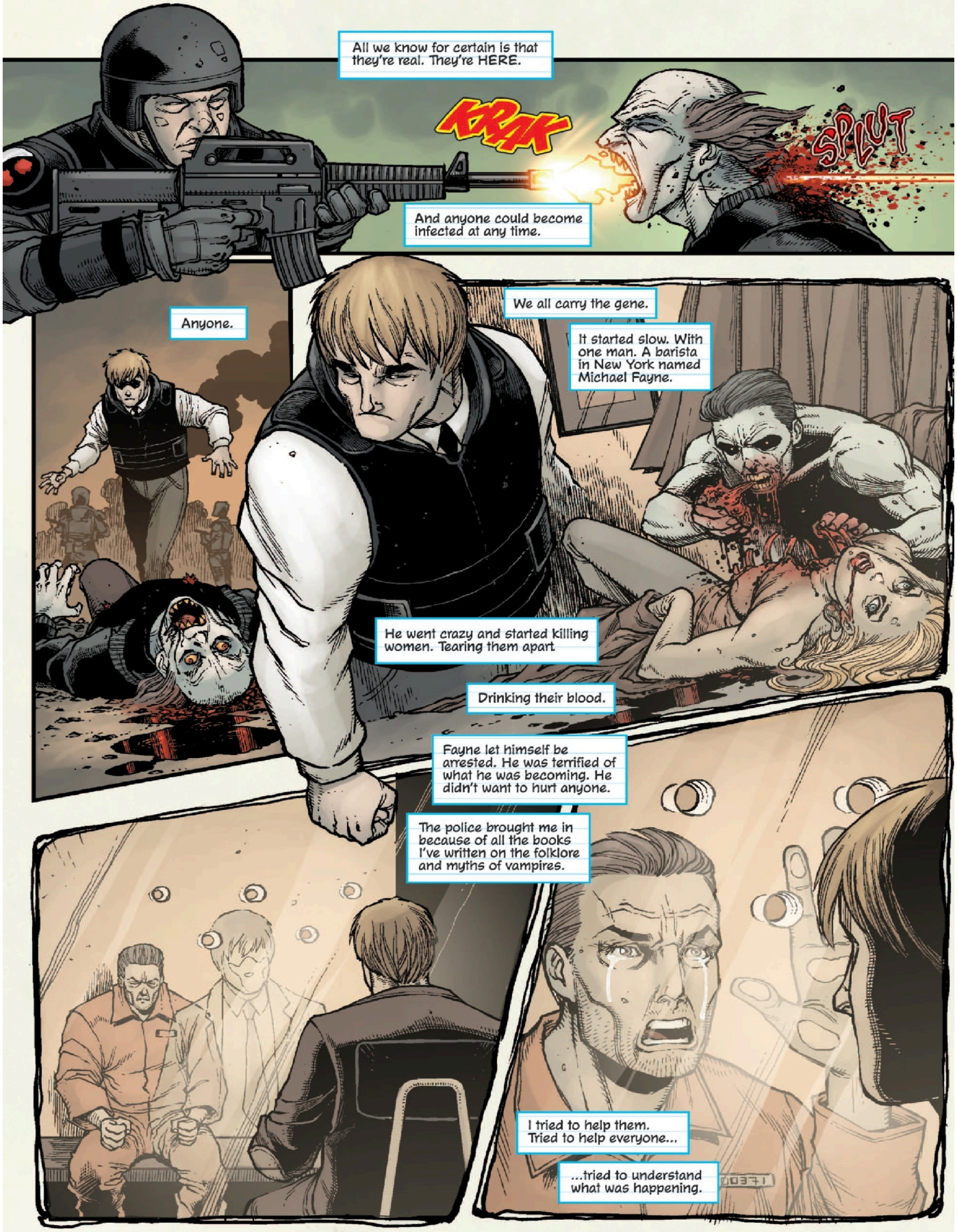
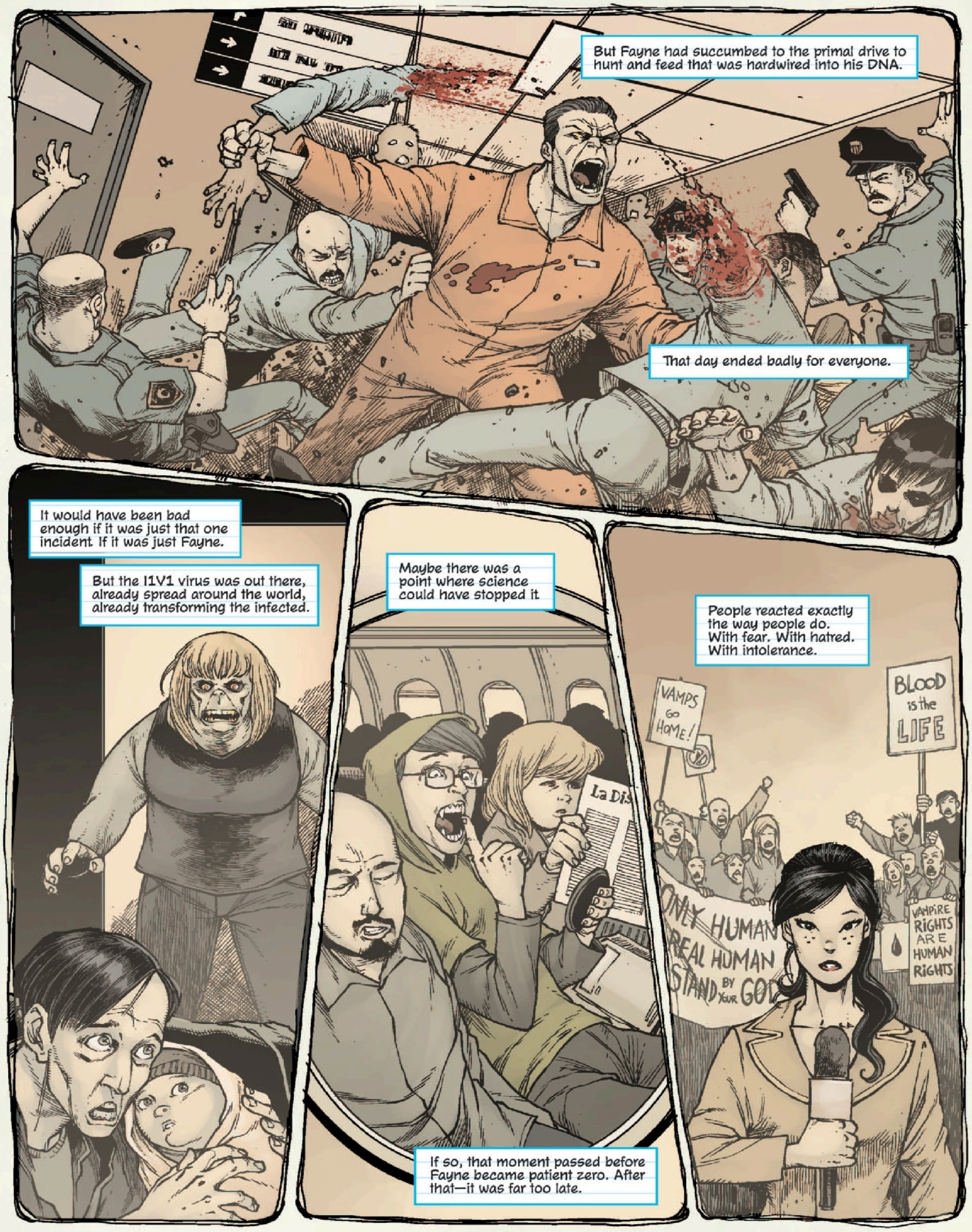
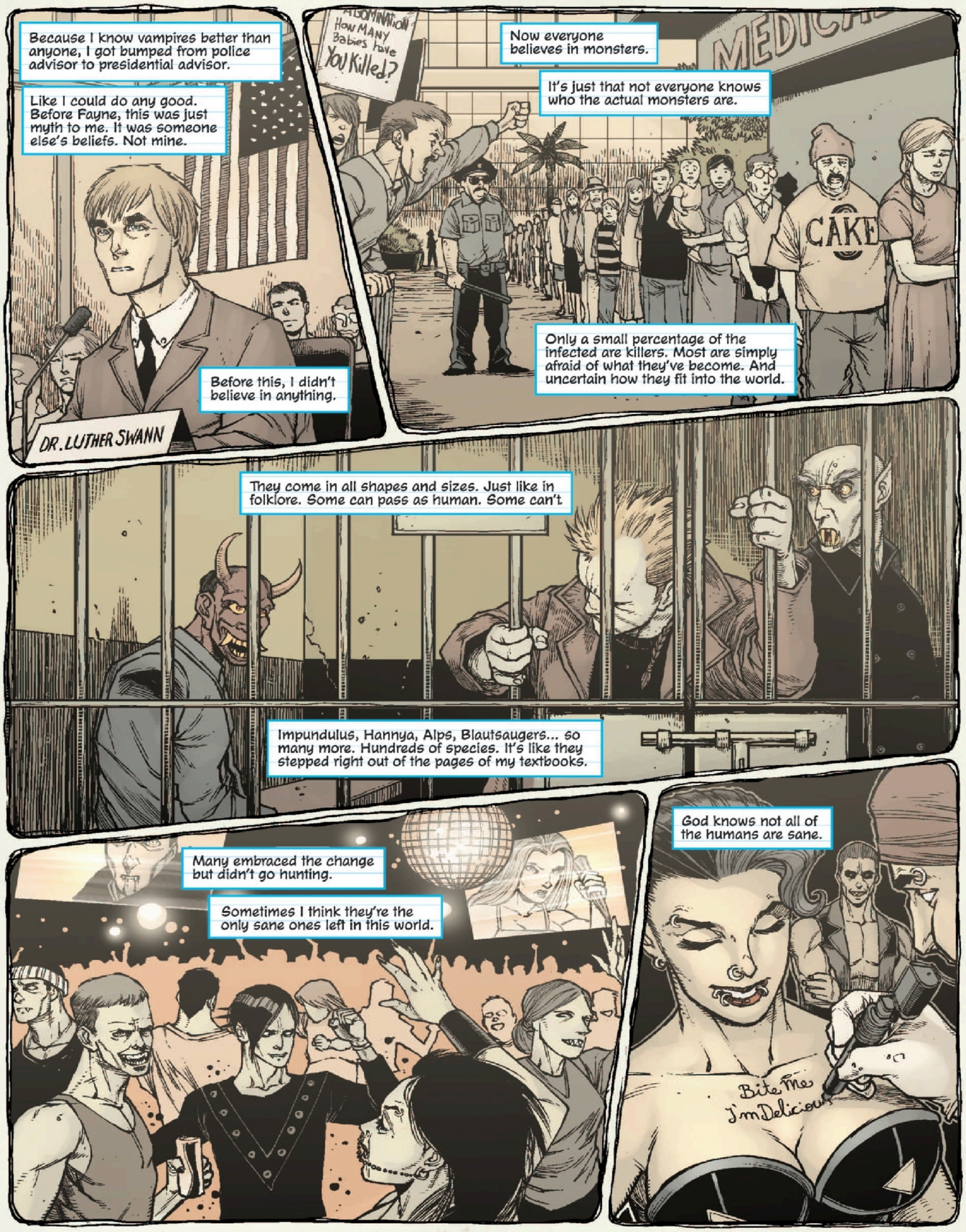
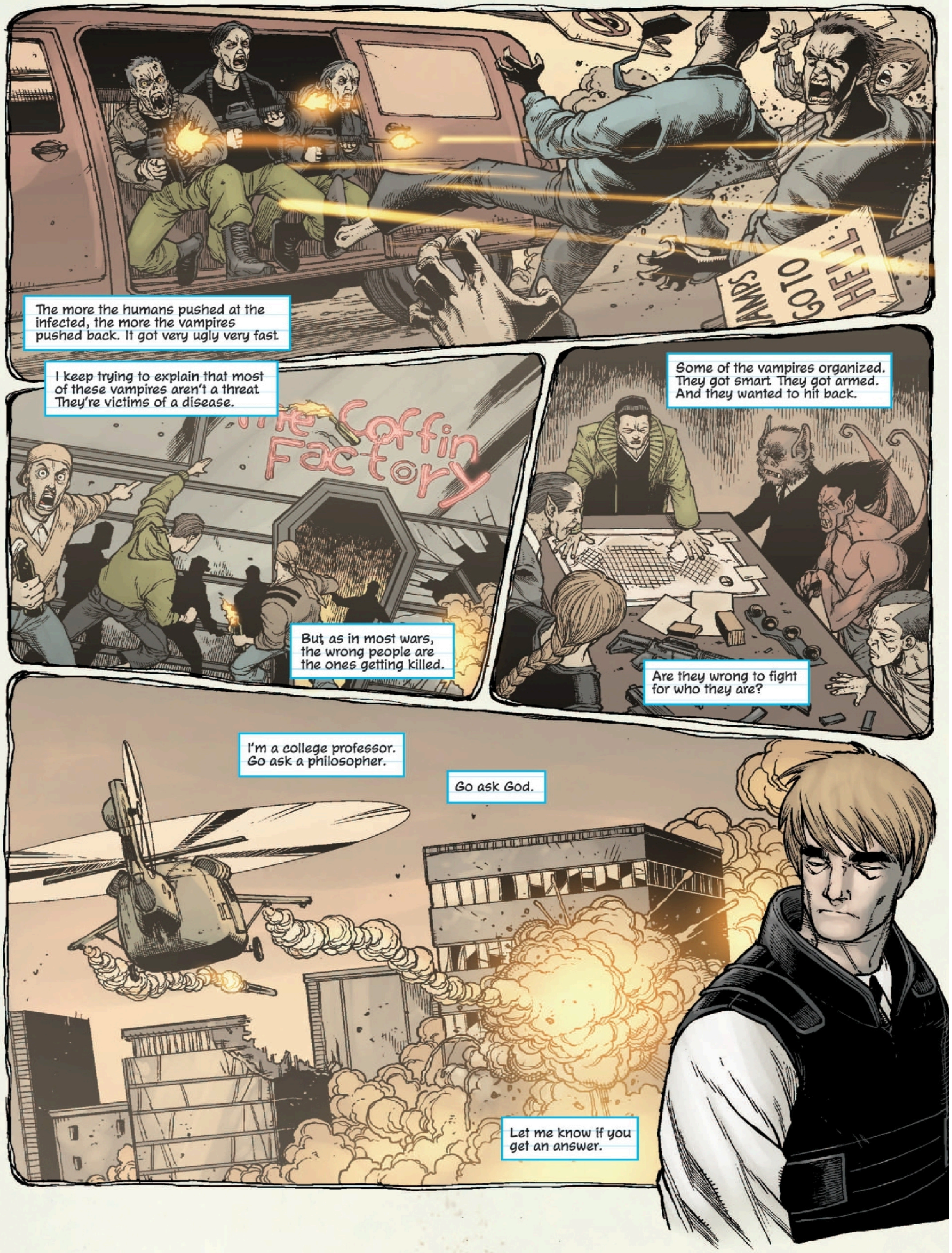

The journal of Luther Swann, Ph.D.
Day 212 of the vampire war
Embedded with Special Operations field team Victor 8. V-8. San Diego, California
This is the world.
Blood and fire.
That's what the world's become.
Us.
KRAK KRAK KRAK
And them.
BLAM BLAM BLAM

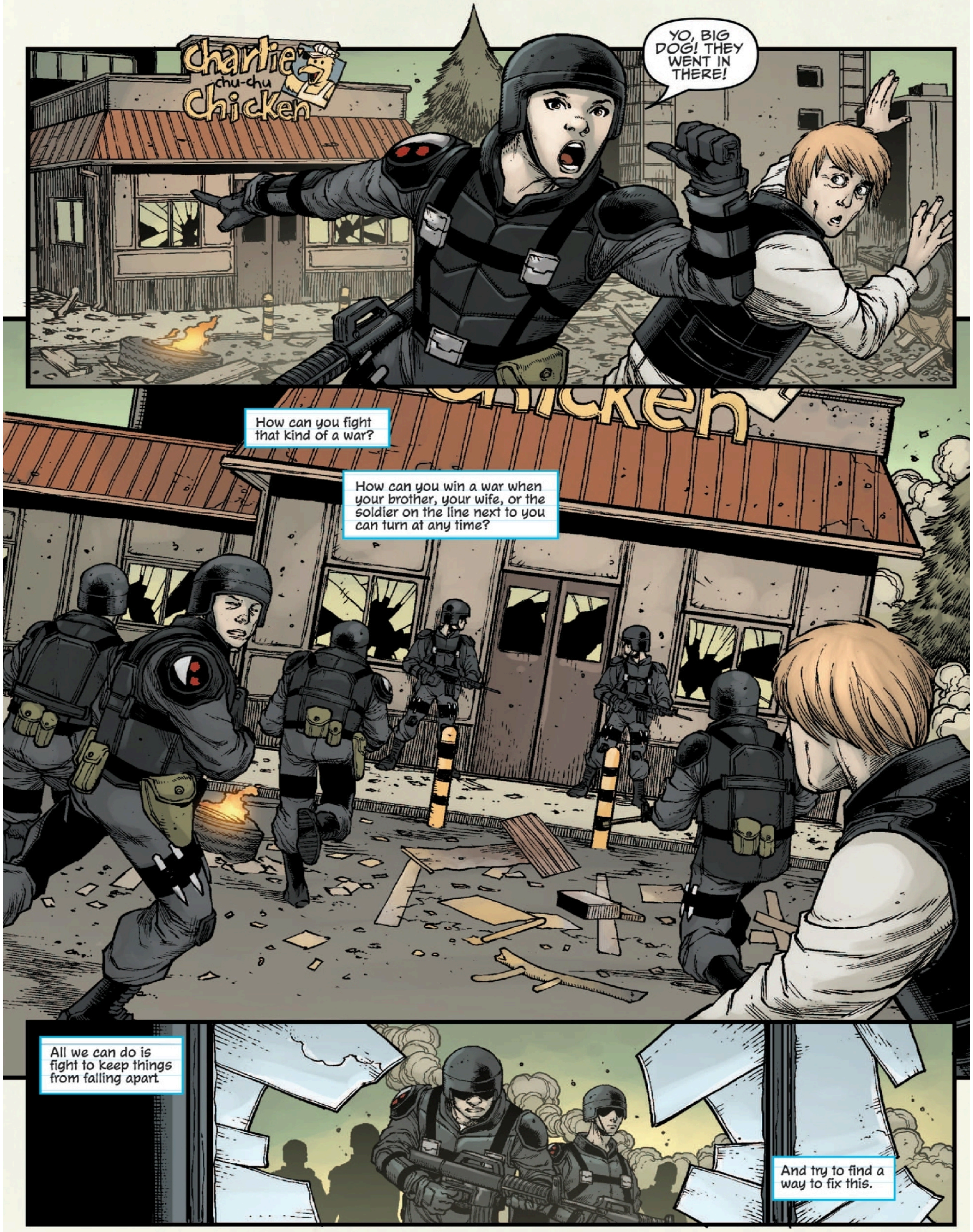

Eight months ago, all I had to worry about was grading papers and university politics.
Then I1V1. The ice virus.
POKA POKA POKA POKA POKA POKA
A disease released from melting polar ice. It triggered junk DNA. It activated a gene that we didn't even know we had.
The gene that causes VAMPIRISM.
Turns out they aren't a myth. So much for my folklore degree. So much for Hollywood.
BLAM
Vampires were real. Maybe a mutation. Maybe a variation on homo sapiens. The science is still fuzzy. Tests are ongoing.

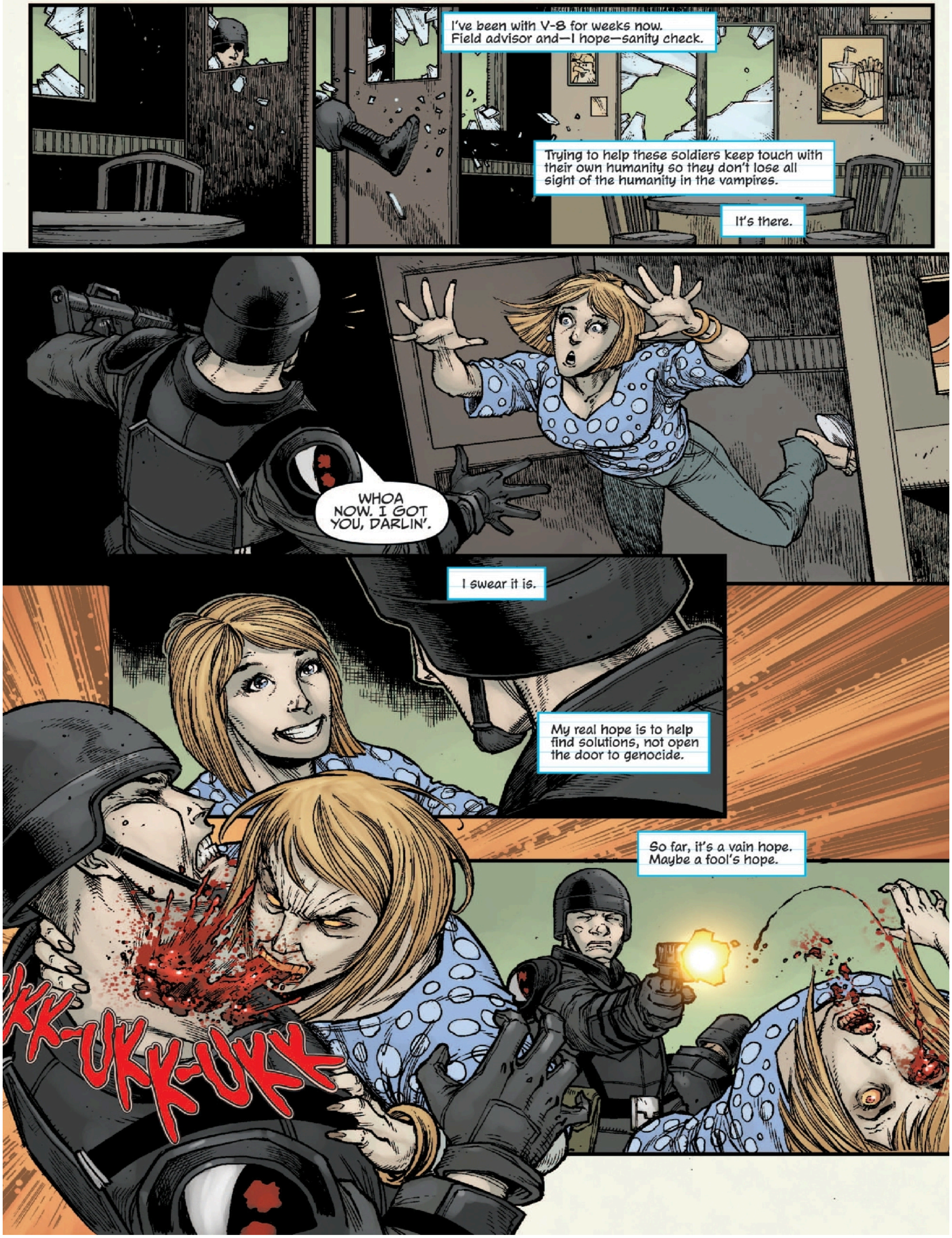

All we know for certain is that they're real. They're HERE.
KRAK
SPLUT
And anyone could become infected at any time.
Anyone.
We all carry the gene.
It started slow. With one man. A barista in New York named Michael Fayne.
He went crazy and started killing women. Tearing them apart
Drinking their blood.
Fayne let himself be arrested. He was terrified of what he was becoming. He didn't want to hurt anyone.
The police brought me in because of all the books I've written on the folklore and myths of vampires.
I tried to help them. Tried to help everyone...
...tried to understand what was happening.

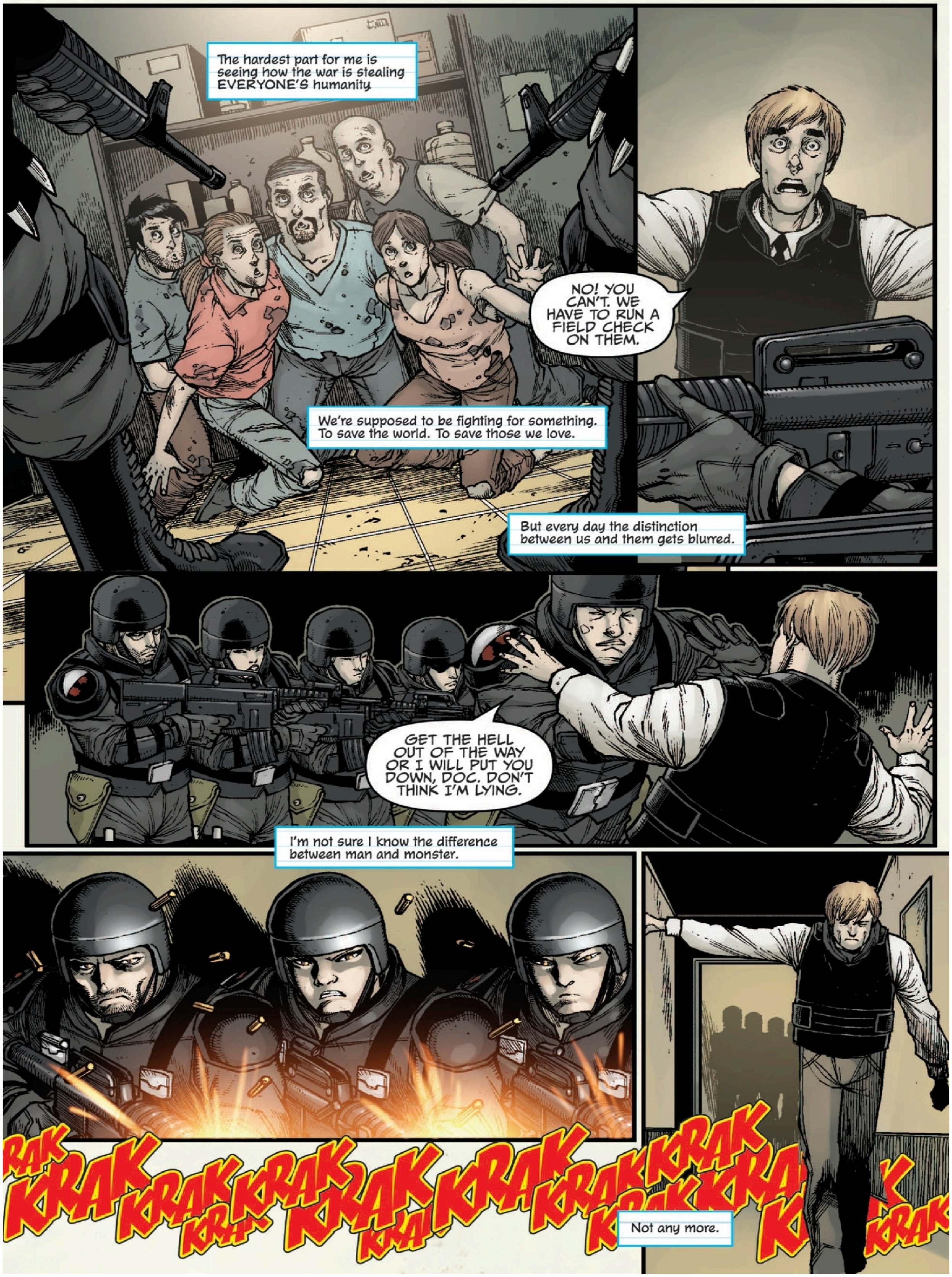

But Fayne had succumbed to the primal drive to hunt and feed that was hardwired into his DNA.
That day ended badly for everyone.
It would have been bad enough if it was just that one incident. If it was just Fayne.
But the I1V1 virus was out there, already spread around the world, already transforming the infected.
Maybe there was a point where science could have stopped it.
La Dis
If so, that moment passed before Fayne became patient zero. After that—it was far too late.
People reacted exactly the way people do. With fear. With hatred. With intolerance.
VAMPS GO HOME!
BLOOD is the LIFE
ONLY HUMAN
REAL HUMAN
STAND BY YOUR GOD
VAMPIRE RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

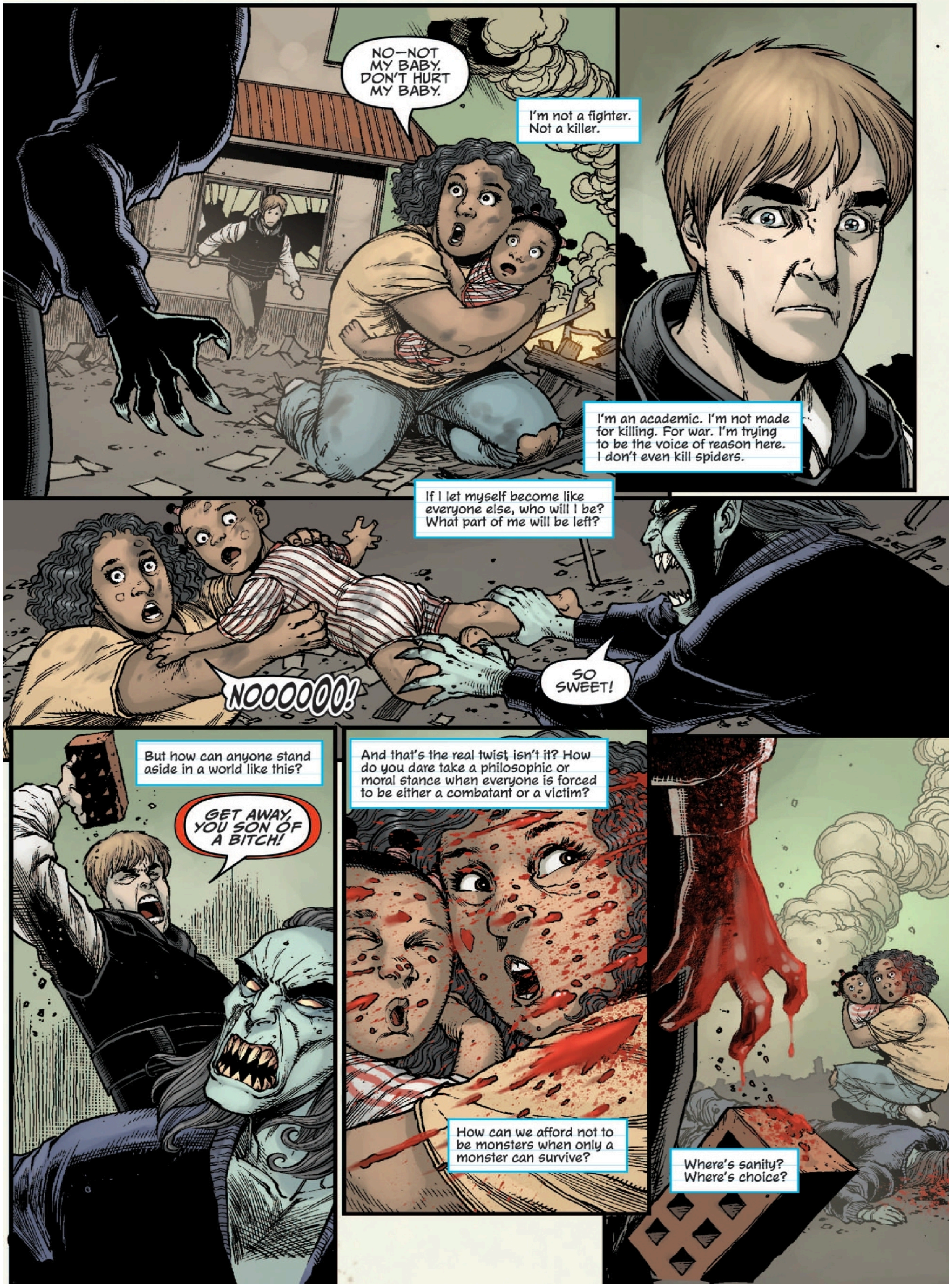

Because I know vampires better than anyone, I got bumped from police advisor to presidential advisor.
Like I could do any good. Before Fayne, this was just myth to me. It was someone else's beliefs. Not mine.
Before this, I didn't believe in anything.
DR. LUTHER SWANN
ABOMINATION How MANY Babies have You Killed?
MEDICAL
Now everyone believes in monsters.
It's just that not everyone knows who the actual monsters are.
CAKE
Only a small percentage of the infected are killers. Most are simply afraid of what they've become. And uncertain how they fit into the world.
They come in all shapes and sizes. Just like in folklore. Some can pass as human. Some can't.
Impundulus, Hannya, Alps, Blautsaugers... so many more. Hundreds of species. It's like they stepped right out of the pages of my textbooks.
Many embraced the change but didn't go hunting.
Sometimes I think they're the only sane ones left in this world.
God knows not all of the humans are sane.
Bite Me I'm Delicious

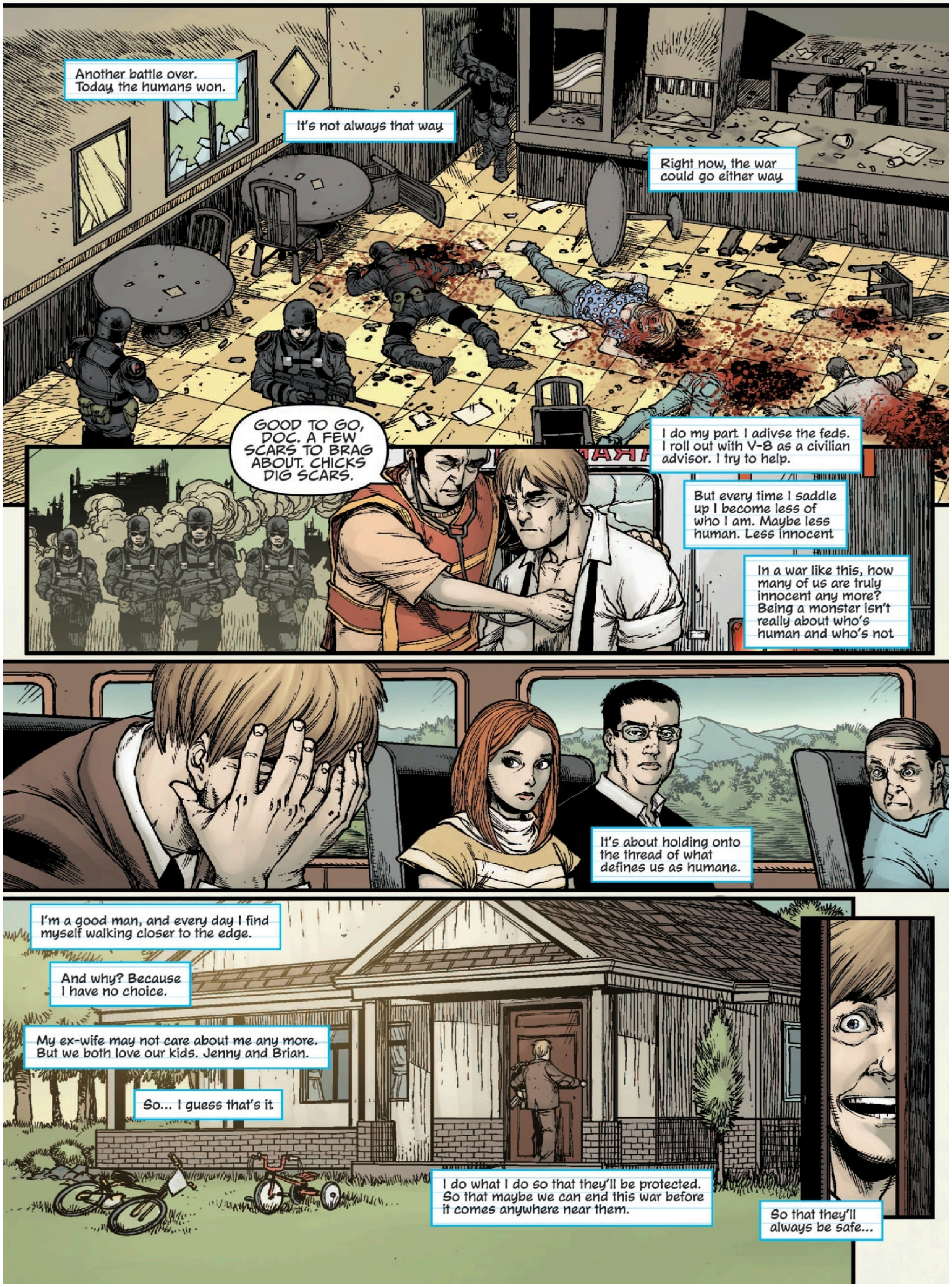

AMPS GO TO HELL
The more the humans pushed at the infected, the more the vampires pushed back. It got very ugly very fast.
I keep trying to explain that most of these vampires aren't a threat. They're victims of a disease.
The Coffin Factory
But, as in most wars, the wrong people are the ones getting killed.
Some of the vampires organized. They got smart. They got armed. And they wanted to hit back.
Are they wrong to fight for who they are?
I'm a college professor. Go ask a philosopher.
Go ask God.
Let me know if you get an answer.

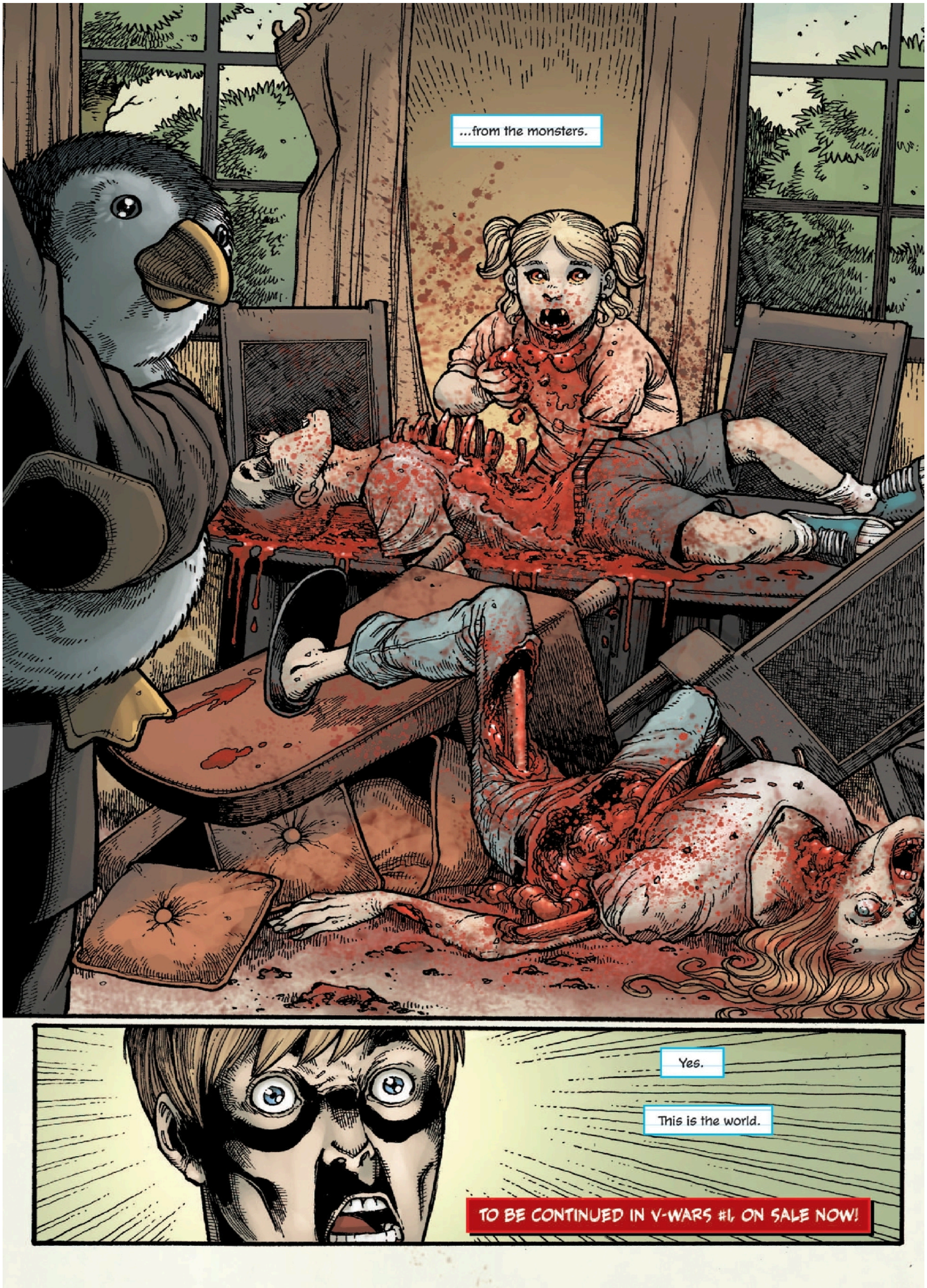

Charlie chu-chu Chicken
YO, BIG DOG! THEY WENT IN THERE!
Chicken
How can you fight that kind of a war?
How can you win a war when your brother, your wife, or the soldier on the line next to you can turn at any time?
All we can do is fight to keep things from falling apart
And try to find a way to fix this.

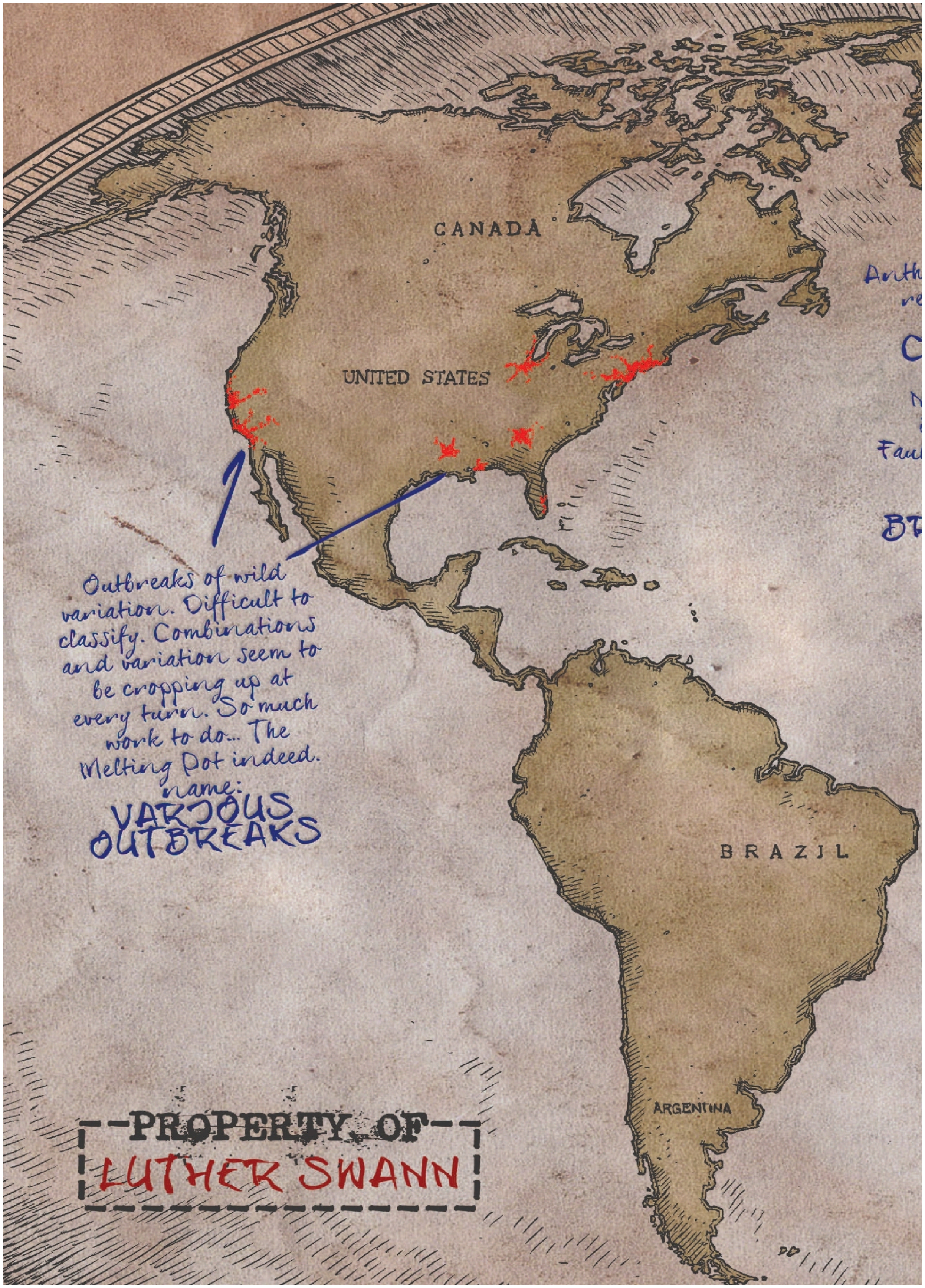

I've been with V-8 for weeks now. Field advisor and—I hope—sanity check.
Trying to help these soldiers keep touch with their own humanity so they don't lose all sight of the humanity in the vampires.
It's there.
WHOA NOW. I GOT YOU, DARLIN'.
I swear it is.
My real hope is to help find solutions, not open the door to genocide.
KK-UKK-UKK
So far, it's a vain hope. Maybe a fool's hope.


The hardest part for me is seeing how the war is stealing EVERYONE'S humanity.
NO! YOU CAN'T. WE HAVE TO RUN A FIELD CHECK ON THEM.
We're supposed to be fighting for something. To save the world. To save those we love.
But every day the distinction between us and them gets blurred.
GET THE HELL OUT OF THE WAY OR I WILL PUT YOU DOWN, DOC. DON'T THINK I'M LYING.
I'm not sure I know the difference between man and monster.
KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK KRAK
Not any more.


NO—NOT MY BABY. DON'T HURT MY BABY.
I'm not a fighter. Not a killer.
I'm an academic. I'm not made for killing. For war. I'm trying to be the voice of reason here. I don't even kill spiders.
If I let myself become like everyone else, who will I be? What part of me will be left?
NOOOOOO!
SO SWEET!
But how can anyone stand aside in a world like this?
GET AWAY, YOU SON OF A BITCH!
And that's the real twist, isn't it? How do you dare take a philosophic or moral stance when everyone is forced to be either a combatant or a victim?
How can we afford not to be monsters when only a monster can survive?
Where's sanity? Where's choice?


Another battle over.
Today the humans won.
It's not always that way
Right now, the war could go either way
GOOD TO GO, DOC. A FEW SCARS TO BRAG ABOUT. CHICKS DIG SCARS.
I do my part. I adivse the feds. I roll out with V-8 as a civilian advisor. I try to help.
But every time I saddle up I become less of who I am. Maybe less human. Less innocent
In a war like this, how many of us are truly innocent any more? Being a monster isn't really about who's human and who's not
It's about holding onto the thread of what defines us as humane.
I'm a good man, and every day I find myself walking closer to the edge.
And why? Because I have no choice.
My ex-wife may not care about me any more. But we both love our kids. Jenny and Brian.
So... I guess that's it
I do what I do so that they'll be protected. So that maybe we can end this war before it comes anywhere near them.
So that they'll always be safe...

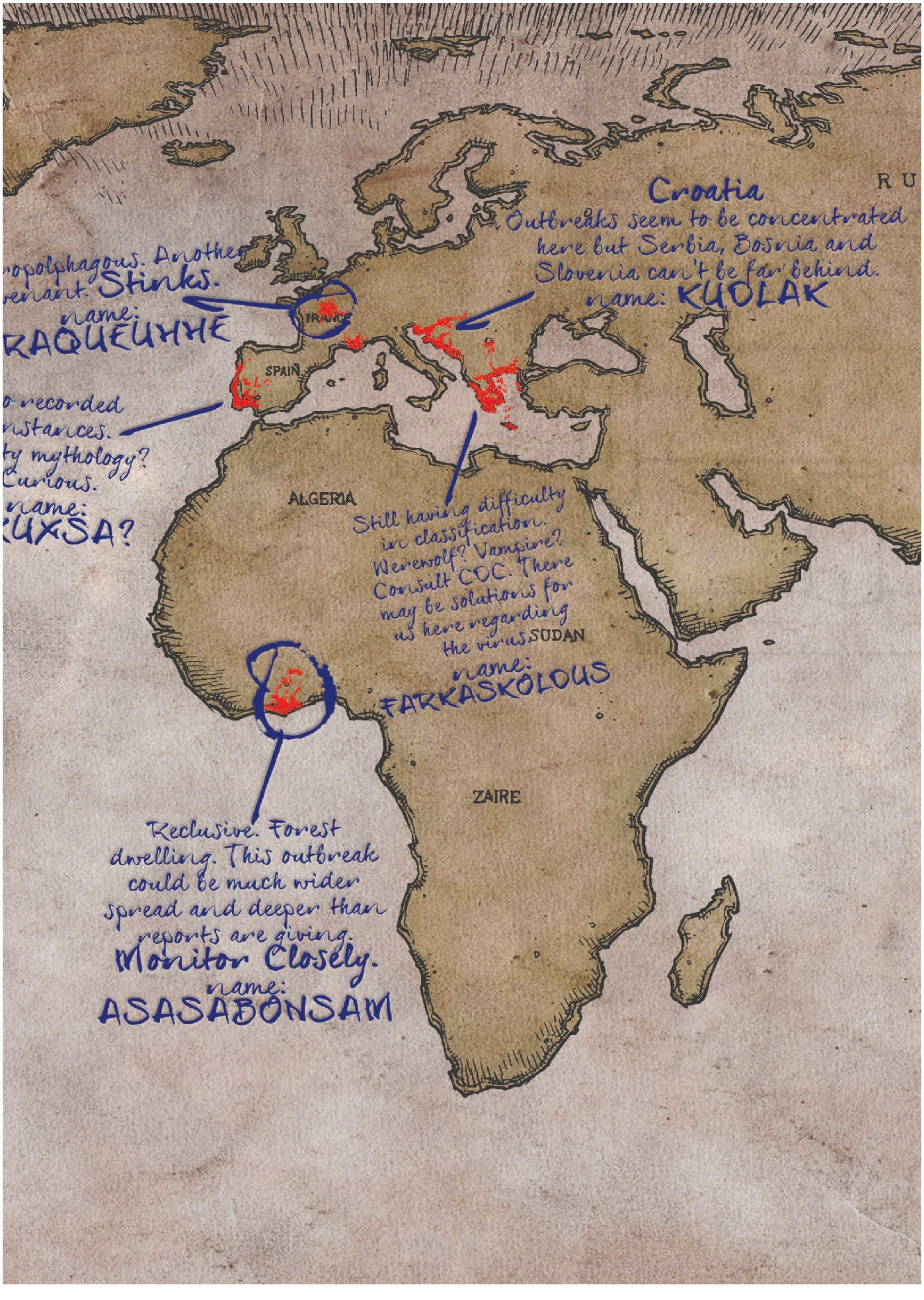

...from the monsters.
Yes.
This is the world.
TO BE CONTINUED IN V-WARS #1, ON SALE NOW!


CANADA
UNITED STATES
BRAZIL
ARGENTINA

Outbreaks of wild variation. Difficult to classify. Combinations and variation seem to be cropping up at every turn. So much work to do... The Melting Pot indeed.

name:
VARIOUS OUTBREAKS

PROPERTY OF
LUTHER SWANN



Croatia
Outbreaks seem to be concentrated
here but Serbia, Bosnia and
Slovenia can't be far behind.
name: **KUDLAK**

ropolphagous. Another
venant. **Stinks.**
name:
RAQUEUHHE

o recorded
nstances.
ty mythology?
Curious.
name:
UXSA?

Still having difficulty
in classification.
Werewolf? Vampire?
Consult CDC. There
may be solutions for
us here regarding
the virus.
name:
FARKASKOLOUS

Reclusive. Forest
dwelling. This outbreak
could be much wider
spread and deeper than
reports are giving.
Monitor Closely.
name:
ASASABONSAM

TOP SECRET

V-WARS: SPECIES

Congressional Subcommittee on the V Epidemic

Washington, DC

22 Days After the V Event (First Outbreak)

"Let me get this straight," said the senator from Michigan, "there are different kinds of vampires?"

Luther Swann cleared his throat. "Um, that is correct, sir. In theory, at least. Or, I guess I should say, in 'legend'."

His voice quavered a bit as he addressed the subcommittee. Swann had never visited the capital building before last week, and had never in his wildest dreams thought he'd be sitting at a table in front of a group of grim-faced senators. On TV those things always looked intimidating. In real life it was terrifying.

Almost as terrifying as what they were talking about.

"Please explain," said the senator. Every eye in the room was on Swann.

"I've spent the last two days going over all of the evidence collected at the different crime scenes, and reviewing the medical test data from the subjects who have been arrested. Two of them bear strong resemblance to Fayne, in terms of what they did and what they appear capable of doing. But even then, 'strong' resemblance isn't the same thing as saying that they're from the same species."

"'Species'?", echoed the senator.

"Yes, sir," said Swann. "If we have to accept that vampires are real, then we have to be open to the possibility that there are several kinds."

"Why?" demanded the senator from Georgia. "I thought all vampires are the same. Fangs and capes and all that."

"All of 'that', senator," said Swann, "is nonsense. It's the product of a century of Hollywood movies and two centuries of literary invention. The version of the vampire we have in pop culture is in one way or another the by-product of Dracula, which was the creation of Bram Stoker, and to a lesser degree Carmilla, created by Sheridan le Fanu, as well as the stage interpretations of Dracula and early silent films like Nosferatu. They took certain elements from European folklore and modified them for fiction. Every writer and screenwriter since has continued to tweak the model to suit their storytelling needs, and as a result there is virtually no resemblance in either form or nature between what you and everyone else view as a 'vampire' and the monsters of folklore. Folkloric vampires come in all shapes and sizes, from the stereotypical pale-skinned risen corpse to fiery balls of light. Even the label 'vampire' is only commonly used because it's become a recognizable term like calling all photocopiers 'Xerox' machines or tissues 'Kleenex'. They're radically different from country to country.

V-WARS: SPECIES -- cont'

Vampire legends are found among the earliest stories of the Assyrians, Hebrews, Romans and ancient Greeks and they don't resemble Eastern European noblemen in opera cloaks or sparkly teenagers with absurd hair."

A few of the senators smiled, but they were tight smiles.

"What are those differences?" asked the wizened old senator from Connecticut.

"I've written many books on--."

"Summarize for us," said the senator. "Other than drinking blood what do we know about them?"

"Actually vampirism isn't limited to the blood-drinkers. In fact barely a third of folkloric vampires are hematophageous or, blood-suckers. I mean, sure, the blood-drinkers are the most famous of this group, but many vampires attack humans in order to feed off life essence, breath, or sexual essence. A few feed on emotions, others on faith, fidelity, and even knowledge. And quite a few vampires are necrophageous --flesh eaters."

"Good God," said the senator and several others in the room echoed his words.

"Are we talking zombies now, Dr. Swann?" asked the senator from Connecticut.

"Not as such," hedged Swann, but then he paused. "I mean there are vampire sub-types that actually do fit the zombie model. Mindless, decaying flesh-eaters. But that's not really my point. What matters is that we have to broaden our view of what a vampire actually is. We know that Michael Fayne and some of the other recent, um, infected, demonstrated incredible strength and speed, which is consistent with vampire legends. What we don't know is whether these infected will develop other abilities. And this is further complicated as we consider the potential for different powers and qualities species-to-species."

"What kind of different powers?" asked the senator from Georgia.

"Well that varies. There are legends of vampires can affect the weather, causing mists and storms. The Romanian varcolaci was reported to be able to cause eclipses, though this would involve forceful re-arranging of the solar system and would probably result in the destruction of the earth so we can pretty much discount that as one of the taller tall-tales."

He looked around for more smiles, but no one was amused.

"Okay, let's look at a random sample of vampires," Swann said, ticking items off on his fingers. "The West African asanbosam grows iron teeth and iron hooks for feet so it can hang from trees and attack people. The tlahuelpuchi of the Mexican state of Tlaxcala separates itsef from its legs and flies around as a carnivorous turkey who feeds only on the blood of infants. The Greek vrykolakas is a vampire who continually becomes more powerful as it feeds but which can only be killed on a Saturday. The jigarkhwar of India and the Russian eretica both possess lethal stares. Strangely, the asuang vampire of the Philippines is best defeated by engaging it in a staring contest and waiting until it backs down and slinks away. And, believe me, senators, I could go on and on. There

FIELD TEAM VICTOR 8 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

V-WARS: SPECIES -- cont'

are hundreds of species and thousands of variations. There are even vampires who, if they feed enough, become human again."

The senators looked at each other and then each pair of eyes returned to focus on Swann.

"Most of that has to be nonsense, right?" asked the senator from Maine.

"Probably, especially with the theriomorphs."

"The what?"

"Oh, that's the name for vampires who can shape-shift. Many vampires are reputed to be able to change shape at will. Oddly, changing into bats is incredibly rare in vampire legend. However, the abchanchu from Bolivia assumes the form of an old man who pretends to be lost and helpless, and when some kindly stranger comes along to help the old duffer home and out come the fangs and the bloodlust. The adze of Togo can transform into a mosquito. But, I agree we aren't likely to see that. And even if these vampires could somehow change their physical shape, they would have to become something of equal mass. We may be stretching the boundaries of genetics here, but I don't think we'll actually dispense with the laws of physics."

No one spoke.

"Very well," said the senator from Georgia. "I guess the real question is how do we kill them?"

TOP SECRET

FIELD TEAM VICTOR 8 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

TOP SECRET

V-WARS: GENOCIDE

Washington, DC

62 Days After the V Event

"What do you mean you won't help?" growled General May. "This isn't a favor we're asking. This is an order direct from the President of the United god-damned States. This is your country at stake here"

Swann wheeled on the general. He wanted to hit this man. He wanted to punch the imperious sneer off the man's face and kick him down a flight of stairs; but he kept his balled fists down at his side. "Bullshit!" he snarled. "I agreed to help you by identifying the different species of vampires that are presenting during this crisis. I've done that, and I'm willing to continue doing that. But I will not help you slaughter every single person who--."

"They're not people, damn it," the general fired back. "They're monsters."

"They're people with a disease!"

"They are murderers. They're organizing out there." The general pointed at the window. "You've read the reports. There are gangs of them now. Gangs."

"Okay, so there are gangs. That's bad, that sucks, but you're acting as if they're terrorist cells."

"It's the same thing, from where I stand."

"It's not the same thing from street level, general," said Swann with real heat. "Maybe you should talk to people rather than fondle your guns all day long."

"Now wait a fucking minute here--."

"No, you listen to me," said Swann, getting right up in the general's face. "Not everyone who has been infected has become a threat. Not even half of the infected have killed people. That says something. That says that people are exerting control over this thing. Or, maybe it means that drive to hunt isn't overwhelming in all cases. Most importantly, it shows that we don't need to react with a blanket policy of kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out. That's Neanderthal thinking. These are still American citizens. They have rights."

"They have been deemed enemy combatants."

Swann swung away from the general to keep from shoving the man through the window. Outside there were sirens and the air was filled with helicopters, news choppers and Army gunships. Down in the streets there was a rally. Thousands of people were down there, most of them storming the White House to protest the harsh treatment of the infected. Swann suspected that there were actual

[redacted]

FIELD TEAM VICTOR 8 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

V-WARS: GENOCIDE -- cont'

vampires seeded throughout the crowd. Maybe as rabble rousers or maybe as organizers of a protest to prevent greater harm. On both sides.

Even with the windows closed, they could both hear the chants and yells from the crowd.

Swann took a steadying breath and turned back to the general. "Please, listen to me," he said in a quieter but no less insistent tone, "we may be seeing the emergence of a new race of people. Or, the return of an older race. Either way, they are part of the overall human race. They are brothers or cousins. To destroy them all is tantamount to ethnic genocide."

"Don't be absurd," said the general.

"I'm not. And I warn you now," said Swann, "if you proceed, I'll say as much to the world press."

"That would be a mistake," the general said coldly.

Swann nodded. "I know what you could do to me. I know what you probably will do to me. But, I won't stand by and watch my country do the kind of thing that we have fought against since we went to war against Hitler."

Before the general could reply, Swann turned and walked away, but he paused at the door.

"And consider this, too," he added, "right now a lot of the infected are coming out and declaring themselves. They're seeking medical help, they're joining support groups. Right now most of them are not attacking us. But, if you go to war with them, then you will force them to fight back. Don't forget, general, that they are stronger than us, faster than us, and almost all of them look just like us. And we have no idea how many of them are out there. There could be millions. Hold that thought for a moment: millions of creatures who are higher on the food chain than we are. Is that really the war you want to fight?"

TOP SECRET

[redacted]”

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

V-WARS: EMBEDDED

Near Harrowgate Park

Kensington, Philadelphia

142 Days After the V Event

Luther Swann ran hunched over through the rotor wash, following the ten-man strike team. He was one of two civilians with the team. The other was a reporter selected by lottery to accompany V-Team Eight on this raid.

It was his fifth raid with V-8.

It was the third time he'd rolled out with almost entirely new team line-ups. Losses were high on V-8. There were only two members of the original team left. Lieutenant Harris Kang callsign Duke and his second-in-command, Gunnery Sergeant Nestor Wilcox, known as Big Dog. The rest of the team were new faces. The others, the ones who had gone into battle with Duke, were bodies in boxes.

Swann thought that by now he'd have become hardened to it, but it seemed that every time he deployed from a Black Hawk it was like tearing the scab off of a wound.

Swann knew this would be bad.

Behind him the Black Hawk dusted off and swung high and wide until the thwop-thwop-thwop of its blades faded to nothing. V-8 approached a row of burned-out cars. They knelt, weapons laid along the charred and pitted hoods. The last man on the team guided Swann and the reporter, Cooper, to a safe spot behind an overturned UPS truck.

"Keep your heads down and you'll be okay," he said. He had a farm boy face but killer's eyes. The loss or perhaps lack of innocence in the young man's eyes seemed to Swann to be yet another casualty of this war. More than lives were taken.

Beyond the row of cars was a no-man's land of debris. This whole neighborhood was in ruins. Most of the blue-collar row homes were burned-out shells. The nearby Tioga El stop was in rubble, and the elevated train tracks were twisted down to the ground. There had been five major clashes here in the last month. Two wins on each side, and one stalemate that had only ended when the vampires had slipped away under cover of darkness.

These vamps were part of the New Red Coalition. They were the kind of threat General May had predicted. Organized, armed, and highly dangerous, working like a terrorist cell. In the last several months New Red teams had made successful strikes against key targets. They'd destroyed over forty major railways and blown up nineteen bridges across the country. Nobody had yet counted how many miles of electrical and phone lines they'd torn down.

[redacted]

FIELD TEAM VICTOR 8
SPECIAL OPERATIONS

V-WARS: EMBEDDED -- cont'

Cooper, the reporter, had interviewed one of their organizers, a vampire who called himself 'Orlock'. Cute name, Swann thought, borrowed from the silent film, Nosferatu. A lot of the vampires were taking names from pop culture. There was even one whose Twitter handle was Count Chockula. On good days, Swann thought that was amusing.

On days like today not so much.

In the interview, Cooper had asked what Orlock felt was the most significant question anyone in the media had so far asked: "Do you speak for all vampires?"

Orlock laughed. "Yes, even though too many of my red brothers and sisters have not yet shaken off the chains of human domination. The New Red Coalition is small, we admit that, but like the heart which is only a small part of the body, so we are to our people. Small, but vital. Without us, our people will die. Without us, the humans will hunt us to extinction as they did in the Dark Ages. We will not let that happen."

Then Cooper asked, "Homeland has designated you as terrorists. What is your reaction to that?"

"We are not terrorists," said Orlock, his tone hot with bitter rage, "we are people fighting for our lives."

"But you've made many strikes against non-military targets."

"Sure, how else are we going to get people to listen?"

Public opinion was split on the matter, and every time one of the major pollsters posted numbers, Swann saw how the non-infected were swaying. At first they were dead set against the vampires, then they swung the other way based on Swann's appearances on Anderson Cooper 360, the Daily Show, and forty-two other shows. Now, with the New Red Coalition bombing trains and disrupting cell and cable service, the public was turning against the vampires.

Tomorrow it might be different.

And the day after that it might all change again.

Today, though...

Today, the public wanted blood.

Swann crouched down and watched the soldiers of V-8 lock and load. He knew that a fleet of gunships armed with mini-guns and rocket pods were in a schoolyard four blocks away. The vampires in the row house across the street were all going to die.

It was just one cell. One of who knew how many, but from the pre-strike briefing, Swann knew what kind of message this was going to send.

General May had been crystal clear: "We're not looking to take prisoners. Once you determine that there are no non-infected in that house, then by God it's open season."

TOP SECRET

V-WARS: EMBEDDED -- cont'

The soldiers had cheered.

The reporter looked excited. This was ratings gold.

Swann felt his heart sink.

There was no way to win this kind of war.

No way in hell.

Duke yelled, "Go!"

And hell is what it became.

Two of the soldiers rose up suddenly and lobbed small green balls in high, looping arcs. The gunfire began immediately. Without pause. So fast.

That was another part of this war. Another unique feature. The vampires, some of them, not all, had incredibly fast reaction time. They saw and they acted within the shell of a single moment. It was too fast in terms of human potential, but this wasn't humanity.

These were the reactions of vampires.

So fast.

So fast.

The bullets chopped through the air and there was a single piercing shriek of agony. Swann looked up to see a hand floating through the air trailed by a string of rubies.

It seemed to happen in such slow motion.

The hand twisted and fell, dropping past the stump of an arm which was still upraised, blood geysering from it to fountain in the air. The scream went on and on as the soldier sank back onto his knees, his face white with shock, his eyes filled with the realization that his entire life had changed in one tiny fragment of a moment.

Then the rest of V-8 opened fire.

Bullets. Grenades. Explosive rounds.

The front of one of the houses seemed to dissolve into a cloud of splinters.

But even throughout that storm of destruction, there was a constant fireworks display of yellow flashes as the vampires inside returned fire.

Suddenly the hood of one of the ruined cars whipped open and a figure rose up. Tall, thin, pale, lifting a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher.

"Duke!" screamed Swann. "Watch out!"

FIELD TEAM VICTOR 8 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

TOP SECRET

V-WARS: EMBEDDED -- cont'

The lieutenant turned. So did two of the other soldiers. But it was too late. The vampire was forty feet away, his finger was already pulling the trigger. There was a hiss, a plume of smoke and then the world exploded.

Something hit Swann in the face and knocked him backward. As he crashed to the ground he realized with sudden, intense horror what it was.

It was a leg.

Torn from the hip, fresh and warm as if it was alive.

Ten feet away Duke lay in a widening pool of his own blood, his eyes nearly blank with incomprehension, his fingers pawing the air as if he could recover what he'd lost. As if there was some way to put himself back together again.

As if.

As if.

Swann's ears were ringing, but he heard a sound behind him. Cooper sat with his back to the car, mouth hanging open. A forest of burned metal slivers torn from a car door or hood stood out from the ruins of his eyes.

Cooper, in a voice that was as reasonable as if they were sitting at a corner bar, said, "What day is it today?"

A nonsense question.

Cooper slumped sideways.

The day--and Swann could not at that moment remember what day it was--day it wascontinued to slide downward into red impossibility. He heard Big Dog roaring to his team, to what was left of his team. He heard the gunfire. The explosions.

And then the world seemed to turn into a fireball that whisked him up and away from everything.

Suddenly he was nowhere at all.

Nowhere.

TOP SECRE

FIELD TEAM VICTOR 8 SPECIAL OPERATIONS

V-WARS: LAST BITES

Washington, DC

188 Days After the V Event

Luther Swan sat as straight as the stitches and bandages would allow. He tried to follow everything the senator from Georgia was saying but there was a constant ringing in his ears. The doctors said it would go away in time. Like the cuts and broken bones. All of it would heal in time.

At least he hadn't lost his leg, like Duke had six weeks ago. Or an arm or leg, like so many V-8 members had. Or been blinded, like Cooper. Or killed like so damn many.

He kept getting hurt, though. General May wanted him in the field for real-time on-site intel. He kept rolling out with the latest line-up of V-8, and even though he wasn't a soldier, he survived those battles when so many others did not.

The latest injuries were from a raid on a small cell of 'Bloods' gangbanger vampires in Brooklyn. Nineteen dead on both sides, forty-one injured. His personal count was sixty-seven stitches and some broken bones.

In this war, that was getting off light.

"Tell us about the vampires in Scranton," asked the senator, repeating his question louder.

Swann said, "Most of the vampires killed in the raid on the New Red Coalition headquarters in Scranton were too badly burned or mangled for us to classify them. However, of the twenty-eight prisoners taken there and the four scouts arrested later that day, we have members of nine separate vampire species, including another kathakano and two more of the German alps. There was also one previously unrecorded species."

"Unrecorded at all, or--?"

"No, unrecorded in this conflict. Henry Periot of Albany demonstrated qualities consistent with a craqueuhhe, a kind of necrophageous vampire from France. Mr. Periot's physical strength was far greater than most other species of vampire and even though he was shot four times he did not sustain life-threatening injuries. Dr. Feldman can speak to that, but apparently his body's wound-repair system is working at a super-normal level."

"How many species does that make so far?" asked the senator from Maine.

"Twenty-seven," he said. "But if we count those species who have played no part in the hostilities, then the number jumps to eighty-nine. And that includes a few species that we haven't yet labeled and which, apparently, are not mentioned in the literature of world myth."

The senators studied him.

"How many reported cases of infection?" asked the senator from Maryland.

Swann rubbed his eyes. "In the United States? Just under eighteen hundred. Worldwide, just over five thousand."

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

V-WARS: LAST BITES -- cont'

"Do you have a guess as to why America has a disproportionate number of cases based on world population?"

"I have a few opinions," said Swann. "The first is that America is a melting pot. It's in our tourist brochures. We have an incredibly wide and deep genetic pool here. That accounts for a lot of it, and because of so many people with mixed heritage, it's obvious why we're seeing so many of the most dramatic variations on the classic ethnic vampire model."

The Maryland senator cocked an eyebrow, "But..?"

"But overall, I think the math is wrong."

"Wrong how?"

"The numbers are too low. It's almost two hundred days since the first outbreak, since Michael Fayne. We know that the I1V1 virus has had a chance to spread everywhere. The ease of international travel and the movement of so many people every minute of every day has spread the disease everywhere. And our scientists are still insisting that it's in the atmosphere, that it's being released every day by the melting of the polar ice. Taking all of that into account, and given that everyone on earth carries the dormant gene for vampirism, then there is no argument to support why there aren't many more cases of active infection."

"Many more? How many more would you like?" asked the senator, grinning at his own bad joke.

Swann gave him a flat stare. "It's not a matter of what I would like, senator, it's a matter of what makes sense. There should be tens of thousands of infected by now. Maybe hundreds of thousands. Here and abroad."

The silence that followed those words was heavy and dreadful.

No one met his eye.

The senator from Maine leaned forward. "Do you have any explanation for why there aren't more infected? I mean, if you're correct, there should be vampires everywhere."

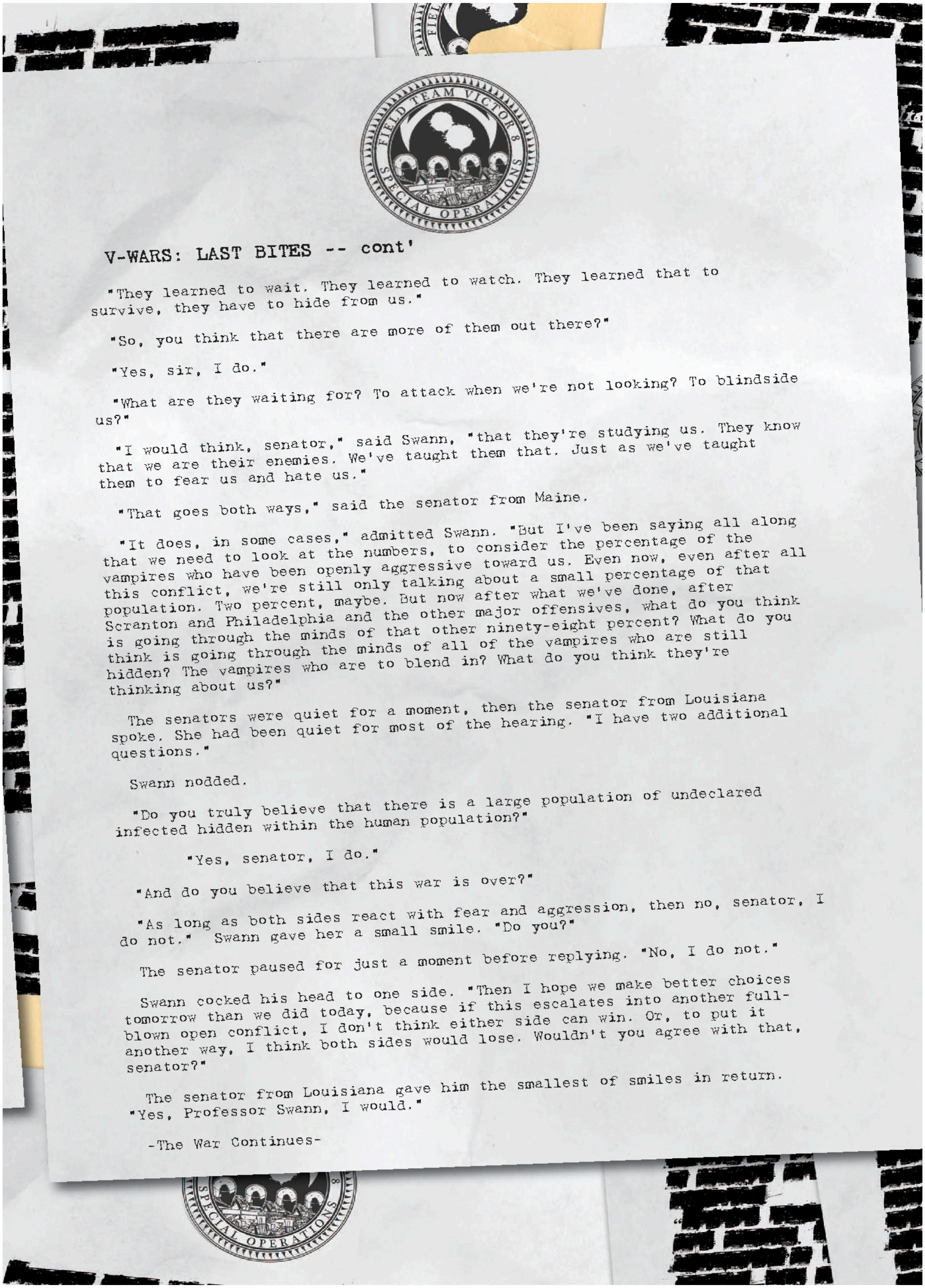
Swann was a long time in answering. He looked into the eyes of the men and women who sat at the long table across from him.

"Senator, I think there are more infected. Many more."

The senators said nothing. Not all of them looked shocked. Swann studied the faces of those who did not look at all surprised.

"After the first wave of the infection, what did we do?" asked Swann. "We went to war with them. Granted, some of them attacked first, but when we pushed back we pushed back very hard. Perhaps too hard. I warned General May about this. Perhaps we pushed back so hard that the vampires learned a valuable lesson."

"What lesson is that?" asked the senator from Georgia.



V-WARS: LAST BITES -- cont'

"They learned to wait. They learned to watch. They learned that to survive, they have to hide from us."

"So, you think that there are more of them out there?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"What are they waiting for? To attack when we're not looking? To blindside us?"

"I would think, senator," said Swann, "that they're studying us. They know that we are their enemies. We've taught them that. Just as we've taught them to fear us and hate us."

"That goes both ways," said the senator from Maine.

"It does, in some cases," admitted Swann. "But I've been saying all along that we need to look at the numbers, to consider the percentage of the vampires who have been openly aggressive toward us. Even now, even after all this conflict, we're still only talking about a small percentage of that population. Two percent, maybe. But now after what we've done, after Scranton and Philadelphia and the other major offensives, what do you think is going through the minds of that other ninety-eight percent? What do you think is going through the minds of all of the vampires who are still hidden? The vampires who are to blend in? What do you think they're thinking about us?"

The senators were quiet for a moment, then the senator from Louisiana spoke. She had been quiet for most of the hearing. "I have two additional questions."

Swann nodded.

"Do you truly believe that there is a large population of undeclared infected hidden within the human population?"

"Yes, senator, I do."

"And do you believe that this war is over?"

"As long as both sides react with fear and aggression, then no, senator, I do not." Swann gave her a small smile. "Do you?"

The senator paused for just a moment before replying. "No, I do not."

Swann cocked his head to one side. "Then I hope we make better choices tomorrow than we did today, because if this escalates into another full-blown open conflict, I don't think either side can win. Or, to put it another way, I think both sides would lose. Wouldn't you agree with that, senator?"

The senator from Louisiana gave him the smallest of smiles in return. "Yes, Professor Swann, I would."

-The War Continues-